

INTRODUCTION

The structure and historical development of the states of the Ionian Sea, their influence on the north-western region of Greece and the Western Peloponnese, not to mention the naval traffic between the Ionian Sea and the Adriatic and the Central and Eastern Mediterranean, mean that the Ionian islands are fundamental when it comes to understanding not only the Greek world in general, but also the Ancient Mediterranean Region as a whole. Thus, first of all, the northernmost islands, Coreyra and Leucas, were chosen as the location for colonial settlements by Greeks of other origins (Euboeans, Corinthians). One consequence of these developments was the emergence of the *polis* of Coreyra, which, in turn, would become an important colonising power in the neighbouring territories along the Epirote coast, as well as the Greek and non-Greek regions that lay to the north of this area (Chaonia, Illyria). Similarly, Leucas, another Corinthian colony, would become one of the main points of attraction in relation to Acarnania. The southern islands of the archipelago would, in principle, retain their autonomy, resisting any foreign colonial settlement. Whilst Ithaca and Zacynthus constituted a single state each on their respective islands, no fewer than four different states emerged on Cephallenia, the *tetrapolis*, and this not only meant that the connections between the *poleis* on the different islands were important, but that the connections between cities that shared the same island and identity were important, even though they may not have always followed the same policies. In short, and in spite of the differences between the various *poleis*, the importance of the shared historical development of the islands of the Ionian Sea cannot be ignored or underestimated. Suffice it to mention the essential role that all the islands played with regard to the links that were established between the Eastern Mediterranean, the Central Mediterranean and the West.

Maritime traffic and the strength of the island *poleis* would influence the development of the settlements in North-western Greece in terms of the processes, whereby ethnicities and states were defined, not to mention the progressive consolidation of certain continental elites and the emergence of their own Hellenic identity. In this respect, it is possible that the island

poleis played a key role in the configuration of the state structures on the continent, based on a highly diverse rate of *poleogenesis*, ranging from the shaping of the first Acarnanian *poleis*, perhaps around the end of the sixth century or beginning of the fifth century, to the emergence of the Epirote *poleis* in the fourth century, not to mention the founding and consolidation of other ethnic and political structures, such as the *polis*-based ethnic confederations (*koina*) of the Chaonians and Thesprotians, the confederations sustained by *poleis* (Acarnania) and kingdoms (Molossia). In short, they influenced the different ways of being, becoming or being considered to be Greek. This was not a one-way influence, since we can distinguish between different aspects in the inter-relationship between the islands and the continent, such as economic, cultural and political relations. These relations were not always peaceful, encompassing as they did processes of ethnic permeability and even de-ethnicization, to the extent in which one state or population of ethnically distinct origin was integrated into another. As an example, we might mention Leucas, which, perhaps also as part of a dynamic process of identity building, came to serve as the capital of the Acarnanian Confederation during the Hellenistic Period. In this respect, Coreyra was able to inspire a process of consolidation of the Epirote elites and *ethne*. In Ancient tradition, Leucas was considered to be a peninsula (*chersonesos*) that formed part of Acarnania (Strabo 10, 2, 2). This account, together with others (cfr. *Od.* 24, 376-378), alerts us to its close links with the continent and with Acarnania, of which it came to occupy a part. Pottery finds in Cephallenia and Ithaca demonstrate their links with the entire North-west, with Epirus, Acarnania and the Peloponnese. Zacynthus, an Achaeon colony in ancient tradition (Thuc. 2, 66), even featuring mythical links with Arcadia, provides us with a glimpse of Peloponnese influence, featuring a curious connection with the Iberian Peninsula, one in which, according to Strabo (3, 4, 6) and Appian (*Hispania*, 25), Saguntum was founded by Zacynthians, this conclusion obviously deriving from the similarity of the two names. All this without overlooking the fact that, according to the Zacynthians themselves, their links with defeated Troy stretched as far back as Cassandra herself, daughter of Priam and sister of Hellen, who would play such an important part in the ethnic formation and development processes of Epirus. In short, the history of the islands of the Ionian Sea cannot be understood properly without taking into account their mutual influence with regard to the Greek continent and the Western Peloponnese.

As a route of passage, the Ionian islands played a fundamental role as of the Archaic Period in terms of facilitating access to other parts of

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the Ionian Sea and the Adriatic, whilst also receiving return traffic from Magna Graecia and Sicily and from the Adriatic towards Greece (both in the direction of the Corinthian Gulf and the Peloponnese and, in particular, the region of the Pan-Hellenic sanctuary of Olympia), without forgetting the routes that linked the Ionian islands with the Aegean. In this respect, Corcyra was located at a key strategic point with regard to the routes towards the west and towards the north. Leucas, whose *polis* was located close to the strait, measuring just 600 metres in width, that separated the island from the continent, also constituted an essential throughfare for ships. Similarly, the Strait of Cephallenia-Ithaca served as a fundamental transit point for naval traffic running between Greece and Italy. Zacynthus was especially well situated on the naval routes to and from the Corinthian Gulf and the Peloponnese. In short, this strategic dimension of the territories located along the Mediterranean seaboard of the Ionian Sea – territories that were diverse, yet united by their importance in terms of navigation routes – is quite fundamental when it comes to understanding their history. We could say that a kind of “Homeric geography” united all of these regions, including Epirote Thesprotia and the island of the Phaeacians, by means of an entire series of human relations and mutual interests, aspects effectively projected in epic accounts that had, in fact, existed since the beginning of the Archaic Period and, quite possibly, for several centuries before that.

All of these themes are brought together in this book. We address the geographical make-up of the region, which is interlinked with different historical processes, featuring an environment of strong geophysical, tectonic and seismic activity, not to mention a singularly mountainous terrain and a strong anthropogenic impact that led to deforestation and soil erosion. We go on to highlight the intensity of the contacts that developed between the Ionian islands and the continent, especially between Corcyra and Epirus, from the Archaic Period to the Hellenistic Period; we might also mention the links between Leucas and Acarnania and even the presence of islanders at Dodona. The ambitions of the Pan-Hellenic powers in the region also played a fundamental role, especially those of Sparta, Athens and Macedonia, and we can also mention the relations that the Ionian islands maintained with the closest Greek federal states such as Acarnania, Aetolia and Achaëa. As we have seen, the book highlights the special importance of the naval routes that ran to and from the west, the ports and the canals of the Ionian islands and, consequently, we can observe the presence of foreigners on the archipelago that originated from both sides of the Mediterranean, ranging

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from Massalia to Miletus. Finally, our study also encompasses aspects concerning the organisation of the different territories and states, including references to pioneering research and modern evocations.

This book is also the result of the research project "Between the Adriatic Sea and Continental Greece: The Ionic islands, State Structures, Colonization and Ethnogenesis" PID2019-108822GB-I00, financed by the Spanish Ministry for Science and Innovation. This project extended others that have been carried out within a research group that has produced numerous publications, headed by lecturers at the Autonomous University of Madrid, a group that has devoted itself to the study of Ancient Greece for decades.

The results of the project we are referring to here have once again been included in the prestigious *Diabaseis* Collection, and we would like to express our gratitude to Claudia Antonetti, the Director of the Collection, for the opportunity she has afforded us in this respect. Our thanks also go to Stefania de Vido, the Secretary of the Collection, as well as the staff at the ETS publishing company for their dedication.

We would also like to thank all those authors who, whilst not being members of our research team, have been willing to collaborate on this book, which has been significantly enriched by their important and high-quality contributions.

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Unfortunately, when this book was in the process of being published, one of the members of our research team, Soledad Milán, died suddenly from an unexpected illness. A specialist in GIS, she was one of the few Spanish academics, if not the only one, devoted to the study of the Aegean Bronze Age. This book includes her last study, which she hardly had time to complete. Never again shall we walk alongside her through the sacred land of Greece, nor feel the warmth of her spirit and friendship. We dedicate this book to her.

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